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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 51/71 of 12 December 1996, the General Assembly, *inter alia*:

(a) While welcoming the efforts undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), expressed concern at the serious consequences of the large number of refugees and displaced persons in receiving countries and the implications for security, long-term socio-economic development and the environment;

(b) Reiterated that the Plan of Action adopted at the Regional Conference on Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in the Great Lakes Region, held in Bujumbura from 15 to 17 February 1995, as endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/149 of 21 December 1995, continued to be a viable framework for the resolution of the refugee and humanitarian problems in that region;

(c) Called upon UNHCR and other concerned entities to intensify protection activities by, *inter alia*, supporting the efforts of African Governments through appropriate capacity-building activities, including training of relevant officers, disseminating information about refugee instruments and principles and providing financial, technical and advisory services to accelerate the enactment and implementation of legislation relating to refugees;

(d) Appealed to Governments, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the international community to create conditions that could facilitate the voluntary return and the early rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees;

(e) Appealed to the international community to respond positively to the third-country resettlement requests of African refugees in the spirit of solidarity and burden-sharing;

(f) Called upon Governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the international community as a whole to strengthen the emergency response capacity of the United Nations system on the basis of the emergency in the Great Lakes region and to continue to provide needed resources and operational support to refugees and countries of asylum in Africa until a permanent solution could be found;

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(g) Called upon the international donor community to provide material and financial assistance for the implementation of programmes intended for the rehabilitation of the environment and infrastructure in areas affected by refugees in countries of asylum;

(h) Requested all Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to pay particular attention to meeting the special needs of refugee women and children;

(I) Called upon the Secretary-General, UNHCR and intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations to increase the capacity for coordination and delivery of humanitarian emergency assistance and disaster relief in general with States and others concerned in respect of asylum, relief, repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement of refugees, returnees and displaced persons, including refugees in urban areas.

II. Action taken to implement General Assembly resolution 51/71

A. Overview

2. According to UNHCR statistics, at the end of 1996 Africa hosted 4.1 million refugees, some 2 million internally displaced persons of concern to the High Commissioner and 1.66 million returnees in the early stages of reintegration.

3. The large number of refugees and internally displaced persons constitutes, certainly, a major impediment to efforts aimed at achieving sustained and sustainable development for the African continent. The Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly, which conducted the mid-term review of the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, noted in its report to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session[1] that as a result of the civil and ethnic conflicts that continued to affect some countries, Africa hosted the highest number of refugees and displaced persons in the world, which placed a severe strain on the development of the countries affected.

4. Developments in the Great Lakes region of Africa have continued to evolve at a rapid pace throughout the reporting period (June 1996-May 1997). While UNHCR had devised its 1996 strategy confident that repatriation of the estimated 1.9 million refugees would accelerate, the organization also had to respond to mounting pressure for repatriation from the main countries of asylum. UNHCR activities in the Great Lakes region for most of 1996 were broadly characterized by the continuous promotion of voluntary repatriation as the only durable solution for Rwandan refugees in Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) and the provision of essential care and maintenance assistance in the refugee camps during most of the year. In late 1996 and early 1997, almost 1.5 million Rwandan refugees returned to their home communes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania in a period of less than two months. Attempts continued to identify and assist the remaining refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring countries. At the same time, a substantial number of new arrivals from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Republic of Tanzania required immediate assistance.

5. In West Africa, a major breakthrough came in Liberia with the agreement by the warring factions to participate in legislative and presidential elections, preceded by complete disarmament and demobilization under the supervision of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group and the international community. This development prompted UNHCR and its operational partners to recommence preparations for the voluntary repatriation of the approximately 527,000 Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries. Particular attention was given to ensuring that adult refugees wishing to return home to vote were able to do so well before the elections that took place in July 1997.

6. The situation in Sierra Leone deteriorated severely following a military coup that overthrew the elected civilian Government on 25 May 1997. All repatriation activities in Sierra Leone have, therefore, been suspended, and reception facilities in neighbouring countries, especially in Guinea, have been reinforced.

7. The repatriation of some 300,000 Togolese refugees who sought asylum in Ghana and Benin in 1993 is expected to be completed by the end of 1997. In the case of 150,000 Malian refugees, of whom nearly 100,000 have returned, assistance in countries of asylum will cease at the end of 1997, while reintegration activities will continue in Mali until the end of 1998.

8. In the Horn of Africa, obstacles other than conflict are often delaying the return of refugees to their homes. It increasingly appears that some countries of origin are unwilling to receive their own citizens back unless they are provided with what the Government considers adequate assistance from the international community for reintegration. While the primary responsibility to facilitate voluntary return remains with refugee-producing countries,

efforts are being undertaken by the international community to respond to their concerns and to improve the quality and adequacy of reintegration activities. In view of the prevailing security situation in the north-western part of Somalia, some 10,000 Somali refugees were repatriated at the end of July 1997. It is expected that an additional 90,000 refugees may return to that part of the country from Ethiopia. Preparations have been made to assist those wishing to return over an 18-month period beginning in June 1997.

9. During the past several years, the southern African region has progressed from a conflict-ridden refugee-producing area to a region of relative peace and stability. Most recently, the formation of a Government of Unity and National Reconciliation in Angola marked another possible stride in the region's advance towards peace and reconciliation, though the general situation in Angola remains uncertain. The voluntary repatriation programme scheduled to begin in 1996 was postponed because of slow progress in implementing the peace process.

10. The World Food Programme (WFP) is the principal international channel for the provision of food aid in emergencies for refugees, displaced persons and returnees (former internally displaced persons or former refugees). In 1996, WFP assisted some 4.2 million refugees, 3.8 million returnees and 5.7 million displaced persons in Africa through the delivery of 713,218 metric tons of food valued at $355.2 million.

11. In response to the various crises occurring in Africa during 1996 and 1997, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supported a range of emergency programmes. While emphasis was given to services for children throughout the general population, particular focus was directed to the most vulnerable children, including those among locally affected families in the conflict areas, internally displaced groups, returnees and refugees. In several countries making the transition from war to peace, including Angola, Mozambique and Rwanda, UNICEF is working with United Nations partners and international and local non-governmental organizations to integrate emergency interventions into long-term programming measures.

12. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works throughout the continent with other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and Governments towards the reintegration of uprooted populations, assisting the respective Governments by providing those populations with a working infrastructure following their return.

13. Throughout Africa, diverse activities were undertaken by UNHCR in cooperation with various agencies, particularly UNICEF and WFP, to implement appropriate policies and guidelines on refugee women, refugee children and the environment in order to mainstream into protection and assistance programmes those priority areas of concern. Special attention in programme planning was given to protection, access to food, access to appropriate health care, education, self-reliance through skills training, income generation, participation in decision-making in camp management and other related activities.

B. Regional overviews

1. The Great Lakes region of Africa

14. The latter part of 1996 and the first part of 1997 saw massive returns of Rwandan refugees from Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and the former Zaire. (The events in the present report largely took place before the proclamation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 20 May 1997.) In the first part of 1997, efforts focused on the search for and return of the remaining refugees in Zaire to Rwanda.

15. During July and August 1996, there was a massive repatriation of Rwandan refugees from Burundi. Another large-scale return of some 726,000 Rwandan refugees took place in November and December 1996 from the eastern part of Zaire. That return was precipitated by the outbreak of conflict in the region. The subsequent return in the first part of 1997 of the remaining Rwandan refugees from the eastern part of Zaire was more a life-saving exercise than a traditional repatriation operation, since asylum in the conflict zones became untenable. During that period, UNHCR activities in Zaire were mainly focused on locating the Rwandan refugees, providing emergency assistance and repatriating them by air and land from various locations. As the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Zaire advanced, the refugees dispersed further west. Between January and June 1997, almost 170,000 refugees were repatriated to Rwanda by land and air, mainly from Zaire. Many thousands of refugees remain unaccounted for or may have perished during the six-month ordeal. Some Rwandans reached the Congo or the Central African Republic, and several thousands reached the Angolan border. In early July 1997, hundreds who had sought refuge in the Congo moved on to Gabon.

16. An important component of the UNHCR regional strategy since 1995 has been to prepare for emergencies in the Great Lakes region by actively pursuing contingency planning and preparations for possible new emergencies. UNHCR will continue to maintain regional stockpiles of

non-food items in Kampala and in Ngara, United Republic of Tanzania (as well as a mini-buffer stock in Kigoma, United Republic of Tanzania), to meet the potential emergency needs of a caseload of 500,000 persons. The strategy entails the constant replenishment of stockpiles, with procurement occurring as contingency items are dispatched and distributed.

17. Contingency planning also plays an increasingly important role in the disaster-preparedness capacity of WFP. Through the planning and continuous review process undertaken jointly with the other major United Nations and non-governmental relief agencies, WFP seeks to identify in advance obstacles to and alternative methods of delivering relief assistance to people in need. When the crisis erupted in the eastern part of Zaire in November 1996, WFP was well-placed to respond quickly.

18. UNICEF provided emergency food, water and health and sanitation services to locally affected populations in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A child vaccination campaign was implemented with the financial and technical support of UNICEF, targeted to reach 2 to 3 million children. In Tingi-Tingi, Amisi, Kisingani and other areas, UNICEF gave particular attention to the registration, care and reunification of thousands of unaccompanied children.

19. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the repatriation movement of more than 500,000 Rwandan refugees in December 1996 and January 1997 followed the sudden exodus of the refugees from the camps towards the interior of the country, a movement which was later redirected to Rwanda by the security forces.

20. At the beginning of July 1997, UNHCR was taking care of 408,000 refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, some 309,000 of whom were from Burundi and some 95,000 were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNHCR is currently working to create a mechanism between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania to permit an early and safe return of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Meanwhile, UNDP is assisting the Government with sustainable development programmes for areas that temporarily sheltered 600,000 Rwandan refugees. In the Kigoma region, where there has been an influx of refugees from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNDP and the Government are leading the formulation of a broad-based reconstruction and development programme.

21. In accordance with its mandate, UNHCR will continue to promote the repatriation of the remaining Rwandan refugees who wish to return from countries in the region and provide international protection and assistance in countries of asylum to refugees who cannot yet return. An enlarged reintegration and rehabilitation programme has been established in Rwanda to help the Rwandan authorities to cope with the massive numbers of returnees. UNHCR will also undertake short-term rehabilitation of refugee-affected areas through limited interventions and by acting as a catalyst for longer-term rehabilitation by development agencies. In implementing those activities, UNHCR will continue to work closely with national Governments, other humanitarian agencies and the international community as a whole. In that context, UNDP and UNHCR are setting up a joint unit for rehabilitation activities, designed to smooth the transition from a relief to a development focus. The unit reinforces the national capacity for the design, implementation and monitoring of projects and programmes for reintegration and rehabilitation.

22. Following the rapid and massive return of refugees in late 1996 and early 1997, UNICEF focused on quickly expanding essential services in Rwanda, such as health, nutrition, education and social services, to meet the urgent needs of returning children. A special focus was placed on unaccompanied and traumatized children. The number of unaccompanied minors living in children's centres in home communes in Rwanda was estimated to be 6,500. Many of those centres were reported to be overcrowded and inadequately staffed.

23. WFP supported a seed-protection programme for returnees in Rwanda to enable the harvesting of land while limiting the consumption of seeds.

24. UNHCR objectives for Burundi in 1997 have been reviewed and adapted to continuous changes in that country, and are now targeted to assist returnees and some 100,000 internally displaced persons in the provinces and home communes of the returnees. The assistance programmes consist of monitoring the returnees, providing them with one-time assistance, rehabilitating the environment in the returnee areas and establishing durable solutions for those who cannot repatriate (the urban caseload). Assistance to internally displaced persons is provided through quick-impact projects in the returnee communes. Such projects are especially focused on community services, such as schools, health centres and sanitation facilities. In the northern provinces, a programme to construct 500 houses for returnees from Rwanda who have not been able to settle in their commune of origin has already commenced.

25. In Burundi, UNICEF emphasized the provision of basic health and water services to populations in those provinces most affected by violence. An additional concern

in Burundi was the situation and condition of the country's internally displaced or dispersed populations, estimated at more than 700,000, and the policy of the Government of Burundi to regroup civilian populations into camps where living conditions and health services were reported to be inadequate.

26. Because of the security situation in Burundi, UNHCR continued to maintain its policy of neither promoting nor facilitating repatriation; it provided assistance, however, to a total of 128,200 Burundians who had returned spontaneously since November 1996.

27. UNDP worked with the Government and, as part of its capacity-building effort, allocated $2.5 million to support the new ministry overseeing resettlement and rehabilitation. That enabled the ministry to establish a database and information system on returnees, refugees and internally displaced persons.

28. In Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania, UNHCR undertook a range of rehabilitation activities to compensate for the severe impact on the environment and local infrastructure of the large number of Rwandan refugees.

2. West Africa

(a) Repatriation of Liberian refugees

29. There are approximately 527,000 Liberian refugees in the neighbouring countries of Côte d'Ivoire (210,000) and Guinea (280,000) and as far away as Ghana and Nigeria. By the end of 1998, UNHCR hopes to have repatriated 506,000 of those refugees, namely, those who are expected to seek UNHCR assistance to repatriate. The appeal launched on 10 June 1997 covers the repatriation of that caseload as well as a range of reintegration initiatives to be undertaken in coordination with the Government and other United Nations and non-governmental agencies. Total requirements under the appeal, which covers an 18-month period, amount to some $54 million; of that amount, $17 million is required in 1997.

30. As part of the concerted efforts to consolidate the peace process in Liberia, UNHCR and its implementing partners facilitated the repatriation of those Liberian refugees seeking to return home in time to participate in the elections held in July 1997. Larger-scale organized repatriation assistance has been planned taking into account elements such as the security situation, logistical constraints resulting from the rainy season and the wish expressed by some refugees to return only after the end of the school year and after the harvest.

31. In order to begin rehabilitation activities in returnee areas as early as possible, two technical missions were fielded, in May and July 1997, to design quick-impact projects to be implemented in close coordination with other humanitarian and development agencies, as well as with bilateral donors. UNHCR will establish sub-field offices in returnee areas to monitor repatriation and reintegration activities.

32. In April 1997, a WFP/UNHCR joint food assessment mission, with the participation of non-governmental organizations and donor representatives, visited Liberia. The mission recommended that priority be given to women beneficiaries at all stages of the food assistance process. Special modalities have been developed to ensure that women refugees participate in the food management and distribution process and that they are better informed of their entitlements. Gender sensitivity has been reinforced through training activities for WFP, UNHCR and implementing partner staff. Gender-specific data are being systematically collected for the design and implementation of all UNHCR projects. In addition to targeted feeding programmes for vulnerable groups, WFP implemented food-for-work projects for refugees in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

33. In Liberia, UNICEF continues to play the lead role in the demobilization of child soldiers by supporting transit centres; counselling, tracing and reunification activities; and programmes to engage child soldiers and all war-affected children in educational or vocational activities to facilitate their social and community reintegration. UNICEF is also supporting the rehabilitation of health, education, water and sanitation infrastructure to assist affected communities as well as communities in which resettlement is commencing.

(b) Repatriation and reintegration of Malian refugees

34. The ongoing implementation of the "*pacte national*" and the sustained efforts by the Malian authorities for national reconciliation culminated in the adoption of an amnesty law, promulgated in March 1997. This major development, together with the equally important signing of tripartite agreements between the Malian Government, the asylum countries and UNHCR, have significantly contributed to the atmosphere of peace and security prevailing in the country, particularly in the north.

35. In that context, UNHCR has been vigorously pursuing initiatives launched in 1994 to further encourage and promote voluntary repatriation of the remaining Malian refugees in Algeria, Burkina Faso, the Niger and other countries of asylum. As part of its efforts to encourage

voluntary repatriation, UNHCR launched an information campaign to sensitize refugees as to the continuing improvement of the situation in their country. Pre-return visits by refugee delegations to their region of origin will continue to be jointly organized by UNHCR and the Government of Mali.

36. The repatriation operation has been particularly successful in Mauritania from where, as at June 1995, almost all 44,000 Malian refugees, with the exception of some 2,851 persons, had returned. By the end of 1996, some 94,000 Malians had returned home, 35,000 of whom had been repatriated under UNHCR auspices and 59,000 of whom had returned spontaneously.

37. To facilitate the return and reintegration of the returnees, UNHCR has reinforced its presence in Mali while accelerating projects and the rehabilitation of community infrastructure in critical sectors such as water. WFP will provide the returnees with a three-month food ration as well as non-food items.

(c) Repatriation and reintegration of refugees from the Niger

38. As at January 1997, the total refugee population from the Niger was estimated at 25,800 persons, including 24,000 Malians and 1,608 Chadians.

39. Two tripartite agreements, signed in March 1996, between Algeria, the Niger and UNHCR on the one hand and Burkina Faso, the Niger and UNHCR on the other served as the framework for the return of some 10,000 refugees from the Niger living in Algeria and 500 living in Burkina Faso. Furthermore, UNHCR has taken steps towards promoting voluntary repatriation. Those included the strengthening of its presence in Niamey in October 1996 and the fielding of two missions to Algeria and the Niger. The goals of the mission were to encourage refugees to return and to develop, with the Government of the Niger, modalities for the implementation of reintegration activities in returnee areas, particularly in the sectors of water, health and education. Those activities will be carried out within the framework of existing rehabilitation and development projects implemented by other agencies.

40. UNHCR multisectoral care and maintenance projects in the Niger will continue to be implemented by the national Red Cross and Caritas.

(d) Repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees

41. After nearly 30 years, Sierra Leone embarked on a successful transition to multi-party democracy, culminating in parliamentary and presidential elections in February and March 1996. Furthermore, a peace accord was concluded between the newly elected civilian Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front in Abidjan on 30 November 1996, bringing to an end six years of civil war in Sierra Leone.

42. Following those positive developments, UNHCR began to help Sierra Leonean refugees to return home starting in early February 1997. Those returns were carried out within the framework of a three-phase operation intended to assist in the repatriation of some 360,000 persons over an 18-month period. By May 1997, nearly 2,000 Sierra Leonean refugees had returned, mainly from Liberia. Hopes for further returns were dashed on 25 May 1997 when a group of soldiers seized power from the elected civilian Government. As at August 1997, some 36,000 Sierra Leonean citizens had sought asylum, mainly in Guinea and Liberia.

43. As at 1 January 1997, there were more than 13,500 refugees (mainly Liberians) in Sierra Leone, of whom some 11,800 were being assisted by UNHCR.

44. Until the very recent *coup d'état* and the associated outbreak of violence, more than 500,000 of an estimated 1.6 million displaced persons had returned to their homes in Sierra Leone. The UNICEF component of the humanitarian programme shifted from relief to rehabilitation activities aimed at the revival of basic services (such as health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation) to meet the critical needs of the returnees. UNICEF has also been supporting local capacity-building for the reception, care and protection of the most vulnerable groups, including an estimated 9,000 unaccompanied children, of whom some 2,000 are demobilized child soldiers. Continued delivery of such vital services has been disrupted owing to the ongoing fighting in Sierra Leone.

3. Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa

(a) Repatriation of Ethiopian refugees

45. The return of Ethiopians from Kenya was completed in mid-1997, and the repatriation of the remaining 23,000 Ethiopian refugees from the Sudan recommenced at the end of May. The operation, which so far has helped to return some 7,000 persons to their homes, was suspended in June as a result of logistical constraints caused by the rainy season. The operation is nevertheless scheduled to end by 31 December 1997.

(b) Repatriation of Eritrean refugees

46. The return of Eritreans from the Sudan has been plagued by obstacles. At the end of 1996, the Government of the Sudan dropped all preconditions for the resumption of repatriation. The Government of Eritrea, however, has requested that more data be collected on all candidates as a precondition to repatriation. Furthermore, the Government of Eritrea decided, in early May 1997, to expel all seven international UNHCR staff members in the country. As a result, repatriation was further delayed.

(c) Repatriation and reintegration of Somali refugees

47. A pilot voluntary repatriation programme for 10,000 Somalis from camps in Ethiopia to north-western Somalia commenced in February 1997 and was completed in July. However, the beginning of that organized movement and other positive factors have encouraged a spontaneous return from the same camps. It is therefore anticipated that some additional 30,000 refugees may return in 1997 and up to 60,000 in 1998, mainly from Ethiopia, through UNHCR-sponsored operations.

48. In the rest of Somalia, voluntary return has been extremely limited in comparison to previous years (150,000 returnees from Kenya for the period from 1993 to 1996). The explanation seems to be less the willingness of the refugees to return than a decline in aid levels and the consequent additional difficulties of reintegration experienced by returnees or anticipated by refugees. The new approach to programming and fund-raising adopted collectively by the United Nations agencies in Nairobi, in which areas of common concern are coordinated by identified lead agencies, is one attempt to address the issue.

49. The situation in Somalia has been affected by pockets of drought, floods and intermittent fighting, thus requiring a flexible approach to reach vulnerable children. In the drought-affected southern region, UNICEF and non-governmental organization partners took the lead in providing therapeutic food for malnourished children. In flood- and cholera-prone areas, UNICEF continued a mass chlorination programme to prevent the spread of that killer disease, and provided oral rehydration salts and essential drugs to treat cholera victims.

(d) Sudanese refugees and returnees

50. Despite the peace initiatives of various leaders in the region, the influx of Sudanese refugees into neighbouring countries continued. The main countries hosting Sudanese refugees are Uganda (180,625), Ethiopia (38,500) and Kenya (33,477). For most of 1996, the refugee programme in northern Uganda was plagued by the escalation of insurgencies and attacks on refugee settlements, resulting in the loss of refugee lives and property. Insecurity also hindered the planned implementation of local settlement activities, particularly in the delivery of relief assistance and the establishment of basic services and infrastructure. Also as a consequence, the transfer of refugees from transit and reception centres to settlements was halted. The overall insecurity in northern Uganda delayed the prospect for gradual self-reliance and necessitated the continuation of basic care and maintenance assistance.

51. Since March 1997, up to 50,000 Sudanese refugees from the western Nile region have spontaneously returned to areas believed to be controlled by rebels in southern Sudan. An additional 30,000 refugees initially left the designated settlements and were displaced within northern Uganda, including some who were encamped along the border between the Sudan and Uganda. Over the past months, UNHCR has relocated the displaced refugees to settlements, and four camps have been closed in Koboko (close to the border). Continued insecurity and an irregular supply of food rations in northern Uganda have contributed to the movement of refugees from the settlements. Although the situation remained fluid, UNHCR initiated a review of the assistance programme in order to determine future directions of the programme for the remaining refugees.

52. With renewed advances by rebel groups from the south and tight government restrictions on all relief flights, the situation of children in the Sudan raised concern. Within the framework of Operation Lifeline Sudan, UNICEF and WFP continued trying to deliver essential services to vulnerable groups by road, barge and air, including vaccinations, basic education, tools and seeds, supplementary food, water and sanitation services and the protection and care of children with specific needs.

(e) Ugandan refugees and Congolese returnees

53. The renewed rebel activities along the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo resulted in an exodus of 27,000 Ugandans into the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as internal displacement of nationals. The insecurity also affected the prospects of refugees of the Democratic Republic of the Congo wishing to repatriate from Uganda.

54. In Uganda, UNDP is working with the Government to establish an effective disaster management policy for internally displaced people. Existing resources and capacities will be used as much as possible, assisting

development of a national policy and a legal framework for disaster management.

4. Southern Africa

(a) Repatriation of Angolan refugees

55. The implementation of the peace process in Angola continued to proceed at a slow pace. There were, however, some positive developments in 1997. On 9 April, the deputies of the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) took up 60 of the 220 seats in the National Assembly. The Government of Unity and National Reconstruction was subsequently inaugurated. Furthermore, on 14 April, the demobilization of excess former UNITA troops from quartering areas officially began.

56. Against this background of positive developments and on the assumption that the peace process would progress even further, UNHCR had planned to facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of some 300,000 Angolan refugees during 1997 and 1998, from neighbouring asylum countries (Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia and Zambia). However, delays in the full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol and the deteriorating security situation in major regions in Angola continued to impede the organized repatriation operation.

57. Under those circumstances, UNHCR concluded that organized repatriation could not take place in 1997 and would be postponed until 1998. The two major factors in that decision were the Government's position that State administration be in place before any organized repatriation began, and the continued conflict and political instability in the country.

58. As a result of that decision, the 1997 planned repatriation figure of 300,000 persons was reduced to 100,000 spontaneous arrivals, and budgets for 1997 were revised downwards.

59. Priorities for the 1997 programme are completing unfinished activities from 1996, improving accessibility (road rehabilitation and demining), meeting ongoing expenses for structures and facilities that have been rehabilitated in the health and education sectors and concentrating on services rather than infrastructure.

60. Nevertheless, Angolan refugees have demonstrated a clear desire to return home. Spontaneous repatriation continued and increased. Since 1995, some 98,000 Angolans, nearly one third of the total caseload, spontaneously repatriated and were assisted by UNHCR. Returns in 1997 averaged 5,000 persons per month. There had been more than 60,000 spontaneous returnees by mid-1997. Spontaneous repatriation will, therefore, continue to be a major objective for 1997 and 1998. Assistance will continue to be provided to spontaneous returnees, particularly medical care, education, seeds, tools and food, especially to vulnerable groups.

61. Since it began operations in 1995, UNHCR has made a significant difference in areas of return despite limited funding. High visibility and monitoring capabilities in returnee areas have created a climate of confidence. In addition, the 147 quick-impact projects that were implemented have greatly improved community services, creating an environment more conducive to return.

62. The food for work activities of WFP have focused on rebuilding devastated transport and agricultural infrastructure and services, including demining activities, for internally displaced and war-affected people in Angola.

(b) Urban refugees

63. Most countries in the southern African subregion have experienced a steady increase in arrivals of urban refugees, many of whom have passed through several other countries. The phenomenon of these "irregular movers" calls for a regional approach, requiring careful coordination and harmonization of protection and assistance activities. In addition, Governments are increasingly concerned about the problem of "undocumented migration". This is one of the critical problems to be addressed by new government policies. Since for many countries the line between refugees, asylum-seekers and illegal migrants is often unclear, UNHCR plays an advocacy and education role in the region to clarify the definitions.

64. According to the Government, the total number of refugees and asylum-seekers in South Africa, all in urban areas, as at 31 December 1996, was 22,952 persons, of whom 5,369 were assisted refugees. In view of the cessation clause applied to Mozambican refugees with effect from 31 December 1996, some 88,000 such refugees opted to remain in South Africa and may be granted permanent residence during 1997.

(c) Mozambican returnees

65. UNHCR ensured continuation of project activities after the end of the repatriation and reintegration programme in 1996 by handing over quick-impact projects to the Government and other implementing partners, such as IBIS, a Danish non-governmental organization, the Lutheran World Federation and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation. Those agencies carried out development

activities in the road, water and health sectors in returnee districts. There were also many linkages with other organizations aimed at strengthening the sustainability of former UNHCR micro-projects. Specific linkages were established with UNDP, UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to continue development activities in returnee areas.

66. Assets such as vehicles and office equipment were donated to the Government and other implementing partners that have development projects in returnee areas. The value of that equipment is estimated at $9.8 million. Assets with a value of $10 million were transferred to UNHCR offices in other countries, including Angola, Botswana, Mali, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania.

67. The UNHCR sub-offices in Tete, Quelimane and Chimoio were closed in September 1996. The UNHCR branch office in Maputo has been reduced to 12 staff members (2 international and 10 local), focusing mainly on protection issues. Further staff reductions will be made in 1997 and 1998.

68. Throughout the region, training workshops and other activities were held to ensure a more gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approach to programme planning. In order to promote durable solutions, active support was given to refugee and displaced women's local initiatives in peace-building activities, such as peace education and conflict resolution. Particular efforts were undertaken to mainstream those activities. The participation of refugee women in camp management committees and in food management and distribution activities was enhanced. Priority was given to protecting and assisting unaccompanied minors and to the issue of recruiting children and adolescents as soldiers.

C. Inter-agency memoranda of understanding

69. In March 1997, UNHCR and WFP signed a revised memorandum of understanding defining improved food implementation and monitoring responsibilities and requirements. The memorandum of understanding also sought to improve joint agency accountability in the provision of food assistance to refugees. Two areas of particular significance concerned the position of women in the management of food distribution and monitoring and the UNHCR-led project to develop assessment and training materials for environmentally sound management practices in refugee camps. UNHCR and WFP, along with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, also initiated the development of system-wide contingency-planning methods and undertook joint planning exercises to ensure effective and complementary response in major emergencies.

70. In accordance with the memorandum of understanding signed in March 1996, UNHCR and UNICEF successfully coordinated and responded to the growing number of refugees from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo arriving in Kigoma, United Republic of Tanzania. Specifically, UNHCR and UNICEF, along with WFP and government authorities of the United Republic of Tanzania, ensured that children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating women and unaccompanied children would receive emergency health, water, nutrition and sanitation assistance.

71. UNHCR and UNDP signed a memorandum of understanding in Rwanda. Preparatory work to implement the memorandum of understanding and set up a joint reintegration and programming unit is under way. The main function of the unit is to promote joint planning, coordination and approval of reintegration programmes and projects of the two agencies, and to facilitate a smooth phase-out of UNHCR reintegration activities. A steering committee consisting of the Government, UNDP and UNHCR will provide guidance to the unit on policy and strategy matters. It is envisioned that activities related to repatriation and initial reintegration will last until the end of 1997. The scaling down of the UNHCR reintegration programme will continue, with an anticipated phase-out date of December 1998. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR and UNDP have arranged standing agreements for rehabilitation activities. In that regard, UNHCR will focus on quick-impact projects that can be implemented immediately and at modest expense, while UNDP will take the lead in re-initiating earlier projects that were halted owing to the deteriorating security conditions. To that end, UNDP has conducted an assessment in order to readjust programmes accordingly.

72. In order to encourage a move from relief assistance to rehabilitation and development activities, WFP combines the provision of life-sustaining food with rehabilitation activities at the earliest possible moment, thereby lessening the need for future food aid, rebuilding livelihoods and reducing dependency on ongoing assistance. Examples of the WFP move to rehabilitation and development are included in both its emergency and longer-term operations. Feeding in primary schools is provided in many countries.

D. Cooperation with subregional organizations

1. Organization of African Unity

73. A number of joint activities continued to build enhanced cooperation with a traditional partner of UNHCR, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its intergovernmental organs, such as the Commission of Twenty on Refugees, the Council of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Areas of mutual concern, namely humanitarian and refugee issues, were addressed.

74. UNHCR participated regularly in the meetings of the OAU Commission of Twenty on Refugees. As current chair of the OAU Coordinating Committee on Assistance to Refugees, UNHCR led the Committee in an ongoing review process to make the Committee an increasingly effective body in assisting refugees in Africa.

75. UNHCR made presentations at meetings organized by OAU in collaboration with other international organizations, such as the International Peace Academy/OAU seminar on peacemaking as well as participating in other joint meetings, including the OAU/non-governmental organization conference on strengthening cooperation between civil society, the OAU and Governments. UNHCR also participated in technical meetings of OAU, including those of the Inter-agency Consultative Group, which was formed to prepare an OAU report on the effects of conflict on human development.

76. The organization also extended assistance and support to the missions of the OAU Commission of Twenty on Refugees to visit refugee sites in eastern Africa and the Great Lakes region in December 1996 and in May 1997, respectively. As a result of the mission to Ethiopia, OAU granted $50,000 to UNHCR to assist Somali refugees in the eastern part of the country.

2. Economic Community of West African States

77. To enhance institutional cooperation, a concept paper was proposed by UNHCR to the Economic Community of West African States identifying activities for which enhanced cooperation would result in a more effective response to refugee and returnee needs as well as to more general humanitarian problems.

3. Intergovernmental Authority on Development

78. At the end of November 1996, the heads of States and Government of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) met to endorse and launch their programme of revitalization. A division of political and humanitarian affairs will spearhead IGAD activities in the fields of conflict prevention and humanitarian affairs, which are new to the organization. The resolution of refugee and returnee issues is a major priority for the revised IGAD, and UNHCR will extend its full cooperation for initiatives taken. A memorandum of understanding to outline the framework for such cooperation was signed in June 1997.

79. In the Horn of Africa, UNDP is working on a consolidated programme of action that would realize the common goals of IGAD, the United Nations development system and non-governmental organizations. The programme will upgrade the capacity of IGAD to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and to alleviate humanitarian crises and will implement pilot activities in areas affected by returnees, internally displaced persons and demobilized soldiers.

4. Southern African Development Community

80. In southern Africa, UNHCR is actively collaborating with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in areas of mutual concern. UNHCR and SADC signed a memorandum of understanding in Gaborone on 25 July 1996. UNHCR continues region-wide discussions, which should culminate in regional consultations to address issues concerning refugees, returnees, displaced persons and undocumented migration in southern Africa. It is envisaged that these would be joint initiatives of SADC, UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and the International Labour Organization.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 48* (A/51/48).